

Day 21 by kittenCorrosion

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, F/M, cute dad!hopper, it's the beginnings of their relationship, kind of cute?, mostly angst tho, on el's part, the mileven is the angst, this is more of a fill in the blank than anything

Language: English

Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Mike Wheeler

Relationships: Eleven & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, light on the mileven but it's there

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Summary:

"First you say soon on day 21. Then you say soon on 205. Now you say soon on day 326?"

~

It's not the first day, day one, but it's the first day she hears him. The first day she realizes how much he misses her. The first day she remembers just how much she needs him.

Day 21

Author's Note:

it's been forever and i am so sorry for dipping out again but... i FUCKING GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE FINALLY. it took me an extra semester but i am BLASTING out and never looking back jesus christ i hate school so much.

anyways i'm gonna be less busy or at least no longer have homework while i job hunt. some good vibes/prayers/thoughts would be nice but i don't expect any of you to care that much lol.

i have more to say but i'll save that for the end.
thanks for waiting for me. <3

The first time she hears his voice she thinks it's just a dream.

Hopper had only just found her. The cabin she'd been staying in was still on the mend, but the bed she slept in was warm and the clothes she wore—pajamas, Hopper had called them—were soft. After the first week he'd wheeled in the TV, hooked up the antenna, and showed her how to use it but she already knew how. She remembered sitting in Mike's house in front of a TV with a bigger screen, flicking through the channels.

Since then she'd been glued to it, watching Thundercats and The Price is Right and a bunch of overly dramatic soaps where people kissed and cried and then died. It was better than sitting around doing nothing and she usually kept it on all the time when Hopper was gone. So there was noise instead of the dreary silence.

Tonight he was exceptionally late, dealing with some vandalism case, and she'd pushed the heavy set into her room, tucking herself into bed and watching some late night talk show as her eyelids started to droop. Before she knew it she was asleep, the voice of Johnny Carson cracking jokes in the background.

“—got an Atari for Christmas too. We all went over and played it at his house but it’s kind of hard because you have to take turns and Dustin hates waiting. I let him play for me so he’d stop complaining.”

El opened her eyes, immediately knowing the voice. Was she dreaming? Her heart aching for him so badly that she imagined him while she slept?

She recognized where she was, looking around the familiar blackness of the void. She hadn’t been back since she’d found Will in the bathtub, too afraid of what she might see. Not wanting to know what lay on the other side of the veil.

His voice was still there, somewhere behind her.

“Nancy’s been really sad lately. She and Steve hang out here a lot, but sometimes I think I hear her crying... she still feels bad about Barb. Her parents still think she’s just missing. And we can’t tell them she’s dead.”

She turned, feeling her heart speed up as she spotted a familiar structure. Her blanket fort.

It was a little different, like he had remade it with different blankets, but it had the same cozy pillows and she found herself almost running towards it, her bare feet splashing through the murky water. She was happy to see the fort, but it was the person sitting inside that made her want to cry.

“Mike!” She fell to her knees in front of him, hardly believing her eyes. “Mike.”

She was sobbing, hands reaching, but the second she got too close the whole image flickered, and she remembered what had happened when she’d tried to touch Will. He had disappeared. It felt like she was tearing herself into pieces, but she pulled her hand back, sitting there and wiping at her eyes, wanting to just see him.

He looked the same as she remembered, his freckles standing out on his pale skin, dark eyes wide, the Supercom poised a few inches away from his mouth. There was a glow of hope in them and he almost seemed excited as he talked, telling her about his day. She focused back on his words, listening to his voice, the familiar tone comforting.

“—Chief was there too. For dinner, Mrs. Byers invited him, I guess. I

asked him what he thought, y'know, about you. If you're safe... and he said he thought so but..." Mike sighed heavily, the Supercom drooping a bit. "I just wish I knew for sure." A pause, his voice lowering. "I miss you."

"Mike!" she cried, desperate for him to acknowledge she was there.

The tears were pouring down her face and she couldn't help it, she reached for him, her hand barely brushing his face.

His image disintegrated, bursting like vapor into the blackness. The voice wavered too, fading quickly, but still coherent enough for her to hear his last few words..

"It's day 21. I'll talk to you tomorrow, El."

She screamed

"Mike!"

The crackle of static greeted her when she opened her eyes and she sat up, tasting copper in her mouth and feeling tears on her cheeks. The TV had switched to a blank screen full of dancing black and white pixels, the white sound filling her room. With a sniffle she wiped her eyes and then her nose, smearing the blood and tears on the sleeve of her yellow pajamas.

He had been right there and he hadn't heard her. Hadn't seen her. Was it because he couldn't or because she hadn't tried hard enough? Would she be able to talk to him, like she had to Will?

She knew so little about her own powers. Papa had made her do things, travel into the void and find people, and that was why she knew she could see him. But she hadn't tried since she'd floated in the pool in the gym, too exhausted and scared as she hid from the Bad Men in the forest and then too busy trying to understand what this new "home" was. She thought about Mike every day, but she hadn't considered reaching out to him like this, at least not consciously. Apparently her subconscious had.

There was a knock on the door, the special knock Hopper had only just taught her, and she sat up straighter and tweaked the locks with

her mind. He shivered as he walked in and she reached over and turned on her lamp, turning off the TV with another flick of her mind. The little exercises were getting easier, moving small things and turning switches or locks, and she found she didn't bleed as much when she did them regularly.

But the visit to Mike made the back of her eyes throb and Hopper came in, looking alarmed at the blood that smeared across her upper lip like a rust moustache.

"You okay, kid?" He called her that a lot. "You, uh, have a little..."

He grabbed a tissue out of one of his pockets and handed it to her so she could wipe her face. The tears didn't go unnoticed and he pulled a stool over, eyes wide and kind and understanding.

She remembered the first time she had seen Hopper. They—she and the boys—had been hiding from the Bad Men in the junkyard, on the bus, and there had been a man about to find them. Then a scuffle and some yelling and Hopper had appeared, staring at them for two seconds before telling them "Let's go!". She had felt strangely safe with, even though he had seemed scarier than Benny, but had the same kind gleam that made her decide he was okay. And Mike had trusted him too, following the older man off the bus, holding her hand and pulling her behind him.

The boys had told her story to the others but Hopper had seemed to know about her, about her past and the lab, about Papa. It made her feel better, that someone knew and still looked at her like she was just a child and not some sort of monster.

It was what had made her decide to trust him. The box in the woods, the Eggos... she had been scared, afraid of everyone and everything. Knowing that the Bad Men were at Mike's, that they might hurt him if she went to him, it had torn her apart and she'd tried her best to make it on her own.

But the box kept refilling itself and after the third day, she hid, watching the tall man with the hat—the Chief, she remembered they called him—put another container in and look around wearily, like he knew she was out there. Her feet and hands had been so cold she

could barely feel them and she gave in, creeping slowly behind him, not sure what to expect, not sure what he would be able to do but wanting to try.

She hadn't expected him to take her to the run down cabin. To put on fun music as they cleaned it up, to bring her a box of warm clothes and an entire shopping bag full of Eggos. To fix up the dusty bed with soft sheets and let her sleep on it while he slept on the musty couch. She had remembered Mike's words.

"My mom, she'll get you your own bed. And you can eat as many Eggos as you want."

He didn't know it but she'd received exactly that. Just not...

"And... we can go to the Snow Ball."

That promise still made her heart ache, because she knew it wouldn't happen. And tonight she had seen him, had heard his voice and watched him glow with hope.

"Did you fall asleep watching TV?" Hopper asked her.

"Yes."

"So, uh, what's with the..." he gestured at her nose. "Did you have to use your mind to do something?"

She stared at him for a second, wondering if she should tell him what she saw. Who she saw. But friend's didn't lie and he was her friend.

"I saw Mike," she whispered, looking down at her blankets. "He said he misses me."

"Woah, wait, you talked to him?!" The older man looked alarmed.

"No. He talked. I could see him." It almost hurt to say and she tried to fight the tears filling her eyes. "He couldn't see me."

Hopper slouched back in his chair in relief, running his hand through his hair. He looked like he was thinking, trying to make sense of what she was telling him. No matter how badly she explained things, he always believed her. She didn't lie.

"Okay, that's good. How were you able to see him? Is that some new thing with your... uh, your mind stuff?"

"I found Will. And Barbara... in the Bath." She flicked the TV on again, so the static filled the room. "I don't need the Bath now."

That made more sense. He didn't know exactly what or how she saw, but he remembered watching her float, looking so small, and then sitting up with tears in her eyes and telling them to hurry. It wasn't something he could understand and he knew that... which was what worried him. There was no way for him to control what she did.

"Well... look, kid. I know your friends miss you—"

"Not just a friend. Or brother," she shook her head, quoting the words. "Mike is different."

Hopper raised an eyebrow. "Different how?"

El shrugged, not knowing the word. Mike hadn't told her... instead he'd leaned forward and pressed his lips against hers, so quickly she'd barely had time to realize what was happening. But it had made her feel warm, and some part of her had understood. It was something more than just... friends.

"He said we could go to the Snow Ball."

Hopper blinked, scanning her face and seeing how it softened. He'd barely spent time with those kids, maybe a few hours? But he'd seen the way the two of them had held hands getting off that bus, how she followed Mike around more closely, looking to him when the adults asked her questions she didn't understand. He had assumed—maybe even hoped—that he was like a big brother to her, that they were maybe just closer because he had sheltered her.

But the boy had asked her to the damn Snow Ball.

That dance had been around since Hop himself had gone to Hawkins Middle. Not that he had ever gone. But he knew what it was, what asking someone to it meant. Staring at El, he could see the way her eyes glowed at the memory, how her cheeks flushed, reading the emotion that she didn't understand yet.

Well, shit, he groaned internally. She's got a crush on the Wheeler kid and he likes her back. Is that why he's been... talking to her? Oh shit. What if he runs his mouth to someone?

“So he was... talking to you?”

She nodded. “In my fort. At his house.”

“That’s where you stayed, right? He hid you in his basement?”

Another nod.

“And he... talks to you from there?”

“Supercom. I can hear it when I’m there,” she said simply. “He said you were with Mrs. Byers for dinner. He asked you about me.” She frowned. “Why did you lie?”

“I didn’t—” A heavy sigh. “I didn’t lie, kid. I just didn’t tell him... everything. I can’t let him know I know anything about where you are but I mean, I didn’t tell him you were dead or something. *That* would be a lie.”

She still didn’t look pleased but he gave up on that, pressing on to the more important issue. Mike couldn’t know where she was. Or that she was alive. That wasn’t possible right now.

“Look, I get that you want to see him, and if you just use your brain or whatever and listen to him talk... that’s okay. But you can’t talk back, okay?”

“Why? He wants to know I’m safe.” Her eyes were huge and wet. “I am safe.”

“Yeah, but... you remember the bad guys? The bad men? They know you two... they know he’s trying to find you. And they want to find you too, so if they think that he knows anything...” Hopper didn’t want to scare her but he needed her to understand how serious the situation was for both of them. “They might hurt him to try and make him tell them. He’s stubborn. He wouldn’t tell, I know. But I can’t risk them trying to kill another kid in my town to cover up their mess.”

“Kill?” she whispered.

“Yeah. You remember Benny?”

She nodded solemnly. She would never forget Benny.

“You know what happened to him. We don’t want that happening to Mike. And we don’t want them finding you either. They’re monitoring the phone lines and bugging places... they’re listening, to try and find you and cover everything that happened up. We can’t give them anything to suspect. Not even telling Mike. Got it?”

Her eyes were wide and he watched in alarm as they filled with tears

that spilled down her cheeks in crystalline trails. She sobbed quietly but nodded, knowing he was right, knowing that the one thing she wanted to do, the one person she wanted to talk to... was in danger. Because of her.

"I won't talk," she said quietly. "I promise."

Hopper didn't understand the strength that word had, what it meant to her, but he nodded in agreement. There wasn't really anything more to say, but he didn't like that she was crying, sighing again and leaning forward.

"Look, I'm talking to these bad guys. They think I'm on their side. And I'm trying to get them to leave, so you can be safe, okay? And the second it's safe... you can see him. For real. It'll be soon."

"P-Promise?"

"Yeah, sure. I promise."

He wouldn't understand later just how powerful that word was, shrugging his shoulders and figuring what he said was true. There was no way for him to know that the Bad Men would stay longer than she would be able to stand. Of what was waiting for them the next year.

He let one of his fatherly habits override his cautious behavior and reached forward to ruffle her short hair, trying to comfort her. Maybe he would go and check on the Wheeler kid next week, see how he was holding up. Let her know he was doing okay. It's not like they'd had enough time to get that close... he would keep an eye on him from now on.

"Alright, um, I'm going to head to bed. You okay now?"

She said nothing, looking away, and he realized that she was not, in fact, okay. Instead of getting up and collapsing onto his bed like he'd been hoping he looked around the room, spotting the dusty bookshelf covered with some of his old books. There was a familiar title, one he knew little girls would like, and he got up without saying anything and grabbed it before coming back and sitting on the stool.

"You ever read Anne of Green Gables?" She shook her head like he

figured. “Well, it’s a pretty good story... you want me to start it?”

She blinked her doe-eyes at him, the brown tinted hazels that were so damn huge and intelligent. There were a lot of things she didn’t know and understand, but he didn’t underestimate her ability of comprehension, how she seemed to understand his emotions before he did. She’d had a lot of time to listen and learn.

After a moment she nodded, expression curious.

“Alright, let’s see...” He opened the dusty book to chapter one. “Mrs. Rachel Lynde lived just where the Avonlea main road dipped down into a little hollow...”

It only took a few pages for her eyelids to get droopy and she yawned widely, the panic and heartbreak of the revelation in her dream forgotten. Hop gave it another minute, finishing the chapter, and then closed the book. He set it on her bedside table, stretching his stiff shoulders and standing up.

“I’m gonna head to bed,” he told her as she yawned again. “Good night, kid.”

“Night,” she replied softly.

He ruffled her hair again, a little gentler and she smiled at him, that half of a smile that was almost better than a full one. Her light flicked off—those damn mind powers—and he stumbled out of her dark room, looking at her over his shoulder before ambling off toward his own bed.

El rolled over, facing the curtain-covered window where pale moonlight filtered in. She still felt sad about Mike, but she was no longer afraid to fall asleep. Maybe she would see him again there, but this time she would know he was safe.

Hopper had promised she would see him soon.

Closing her eyes she tucked her face into her soft pillow and let everything fade into the gentle darkness of sleep.

Author's Note:

okay first of all hOW THE FUCK DO I HAVE 153 SUBSCRIBERS NOW??? like ya'll blow my mind and i love every single one of you who leaves me a nice comment or bookmarks or subscribes like you guys make my heart SING.

good news is that i have some things written. the first one is a sequel to my college AU The Light You Make which if you've read is kind of one my favorites stories so i wrote a sequel. first chapter coming soon. the other one is another mileven AU set in... a hospital. i have a few chapters of that written but idk if you're interested in that one maybe let me know? i'll probably post it anyways idk it's kind depressing but it has a happy ending.

and then there's aNOTHER AU that's... fairytale themed. i've been playing with the idea since like spring but i haven't loved it until now. that's the lesser developed one.

there's also a slew of one-shots i'm working on that have no ending?? i've been struck by all these ideas and i start them and literally don't know how to finish them. i have about four that are sitting waiting for endings and i'm going to try and sit down and make myself finish them but i just don't have inspiration idk. i'm trying.

in summary, all of you lovely readers are amazingly perfect human beings and if you read all of that i'm amazed and i'll try and post some more stuff soon!